

SYNCHRONIZING CIVIL- MILITARY AIR RELIEF EFFORTS DURING A CATASTROPHIC CRISIS

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USAWC PROGRAM RESEARCH PROJECT

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ABSTRACT

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On 12 Jan 2010, a 7.0 magnitude earthquake devastated the island nation of Haiti. Thousands of lives were lost and more than one million people were displaced. The seaport was unusable and numerous roads were impassable. International response immediately merged on the only suitable airport capable of supporting air relief operations. With no radar, no tower, one runway, and limited ramp capacity, the airport was quickly overwhelmed with demand for access. The resultant influx of international and military flights quickly saturated the airspace and airport resulting in aircraft holding, diverting, and an eventual FAA ground stop for 22 hours for flights departing the U.S. until airspace control was delegated to the U.S. military by the Government of Haiti. The uniqueness of this crisis, a densely populated island nation with limited internal capacity and only one suitable port of entry for international aid, presented a host of challenges for airpower. Rapid civilian and military airlift was critical to the initial response efforts. Strategic gaps in logistical operations were highlighted by the Haiti experience and early synchronization of civil-military air operations is necessary to improve air relief efforts for future catastrophic events.

SYNCHRONIZING CIVIL-MILITARY AIR RELIEF EFFORTS DURING A CATASTROPHIC CRISIS

aircraft.... can be utilized not only in the conduct of war but in the interests of peace, and it is here that we can guide and strengthen it for good.

—Major General Sir F. H. Sykes, 1922¹

When the earthquake struck Haiti on January 12, 2010, it had all the conditions to turn a natural disaster into a catastrophic crisis requiring both a civilian and foreign military airlift response. Haiti was a fragile state with poor infrastructure and limited capacity for internal response.² Its major seaport was damaged and the roads between Haiti and neighboring Dominican Republic were impassable or partially obstructed by debris. Even though the airport sustained major structural damage, the airfield runway, taxiways, and ramps were still usable.³ It thus became the most suitable and logical point of entry into Port-au-Prince for international rescue and relief efforts. Both civilian and foreign military aircraft immediately surged on the airport delivering assistance and evacuating personnel.⁴

While the utilization of military forces for humanitarian assistance is contentious, the use of military airlift is less controversial due to its unique capability in delivering rapid assistance.⁵ With rising occurrences of catastrophic events and increasing expectations of international assistance there is a need for greater cooperation among civilian and military aviation assets. There are previous humanitarian crisis where efforts were made to improve unity of effort between civil-military operations (CMO). There are guidelines and doctrinal publications that address the need for greater cooperation. Attempts have been made to establish coordination groups most of which

have been ad hoc with no standardized approach which took weeks to establish and maintained a ground centric focus. What is missing is civil-military strategic guidance that allows for the development of a standardized operating procedure to enhance unity of effort between civilian and military aviation assets operating in a constrained environment that can be implemented at the onset of a crisis rather than two weeks later.

Strategic gaps in logistical operations were highlighted by the Haiti experience and early synchronization of civil-military air operations is necessary to improve air relief efforts for future catastrophic events. Airlift is not the most efficient means of providing relief, but it is the most expeditious, especially after an earthquake when ground transportation may be impeded. There is a time critical element to the effective use of air resources. Therefore an orderly flow and sequencing of rescue response and relief supplies is required to ensure that life saving personnel/equipment have priority over aircraft carrying items of lesser utility.

In a constrained access limited environment, unity of effort between civil-military aviation assets is all the more critical and must occur in the initial phases of a crisis. Implementing doctrinal changes specific to civil-military aviation operations in key U.S. and UN publications to include the "Oslo Guidelines" would provide needed strategic framework to enhance unity of effort among aviation assets. In the year since Haiti, no strategic blueprint has been proposed for future civil-military cooperation within the aviation community although the requirement for such a framework has been discussed in numerous forums even before the Haiti earthquake. A review of the Haiti catastrophe

and lessons learned from previous crisis demonstrates the need for better synchronization of civil-military air relief efforts.

Background

The need to synchronize civil-military airlift operations was not always evident until the Haiti earthquake response highlighted limitations and hazards when a crisis impairs the affected nation's ability to respond. In accordance with the Oslo Guidelines, it is the affected country's responsibility to request humanitarian assistance.⁶ The Government of Haiti (GoH) was temporarily incapacitated by the earthquake and unable to process requests for access.⁷ Terminal air traffic control was nonfunctional and the airport was quickly saturated with aircraft of all types, sizes, and nationalities both military and civilian. The normal process of country clearances, customs, and agriculture ceased to exist and there was no orderly flow of aircraft. Initially, whoever had an aircraft could simply fly in and land. In the absence of a host government to regulate air traffic there is no standing policy or mechanism for deciding how to apportion and prioritize slot times into an incapacitated country's airport. This is not a problem if there is plenty of room and no competition for space. In today's global world, however, there is a greater awareness of a humanitarian crisis with numerous agencies and foreign nations desiring to respond as they did in Haiti. One day after the earthquake, the Port-au-Prince airport was saturated with aircraft resulting in numerous aircraft diverts.

With the Haitian air traffic control out of service, Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) sent a team of Combat Controllers (CCT) the next day (13 Jan) to help control terminal air traffic.⁸ With handheld radios and working from a card table in the middle of the airfield they provided take off and landing clearance from the Port-au-

Prince airport.⁹ They had no control over who was authorized to come in, when, and how long they would be allowed to stay on the ground. There was no system of prioritization or even knowledge of what the aircraft had on it, only a call sign. This only added to the bottleneck as CCT tried to fit as many aircraft as possible on the ramp. From the air commando's perspective maximizing parking spots on the ground was what it was all about.¹⁰ The unfortunate impact of this technique was 40-50 aircraft approaching Port-au-Prince airport on January 14 had to divert and land elsewhere.¹¹ During this initial surge the airport was a very chaotic environment and media coverage sensationalized this chaos highlighting the GoH's lack of control.

On January 14, a memorandum of understanding was drafted by the GoH authorizing the US Department of Defense (DoD) to "prioritize fixed wing flight arrivals and departures at the Toussaint Louverture International Airport" (Port-au-Prince).¹² This responsibility fell within the U.S. Southern Command's (USSOUTHCOM) geographic region and therefore to U.S. Air Force South (AFSOUTH) as the air component to USSOUTHCOM. However, the Air Mobility Division (AMD) of AFSOUTH was not trained or equipped to manage this new airflow control responsibility and sought the assistance of the 601st AMD at Tyndall AFB, FL with experience in these types of operations. The 601 AMD, part of US Air Force North (AFNORTH) in coordination with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) quickly transitioned their Regional Air Movement Control Center (RAMCC) process into the Haiti Flight Operations Coordination Center (HFOCC). In coordination with the FAA and the Haitian Civil Aviation Authority, a NOTAM (Notice to Airmen) was issued requiring all fixed wing

aircraft to request slot times from the HFOCC for arrival authorization into Port-au-Prince.¹³

The U.S. Air Force was not authorized to “control” Haitian airspace. Instead, they simply metered the flow of aircraft into Port-au-Prince as a measure to alleviate further ground congestion and prevent aircraft divers. Airflow management processes are utilized to maximize a constant flow of supplies without creating either a backlog of cargo at the destination airport or the delaying of aircraft due to limited parking spots.

Airflow Management

One of the unique capabilities that the U.S. military brings is its ability to manage large air operations. The U.S. Air Force has several Air Operations Centers (AOC). Two were directly involved in Haiti, but only one was capable of providing the services required. AOCs are known as a weapon system and designed to provide airspace control and management for the air war which is accomplished through an Air Tasking Order (ATO). Managing the flow of military aircraft for humanitarian relief can also be accomplished this way, however, managing the flow of international civilian aircraft is something that AOCs are not currently designed to accomplish.

The mechanics of planning and executing the airflow was not difficult for the HFOCC as it had experience from previous domestic hurricane evacuation operations. What quickly emerged as an issue was a lack of guidance on how to prioritize the allocation of slot times to the various foreign militaries and other international civilian requestors competing with each other and the U.S. military for limited ramp space.¹⁴

U.S. military aircraft utilize an established priority system that makes adjudicating conflicts simpler and faster, but this process does not incorporate international or foreign military air carriers. The situation in Haiti quickly became a first come first

served process for lack of a more equitable methodology. No requestor was ever denied a slot time, however, some had to wait days or even weeks as demand for access to Port-au-Prince quickly exceeded the airport capacity.¹⁵

As access to the airport became regulated by flow control and slot times, many nations began political leveraging through their embassies to the U.S. Department of State (DoS), to DoD, and even resorted to calling the HFOCC directly to plead their case for an earlier slot time.¹⁶ Accommodations were made on a case by case basis, but through different agencies each time. Again no standardized process was utilized in which to deliberate and prioritize according to humanitarian needs on the ground. A senator using his political clout would call generals in the DoD to influence the system and obtain a slot time in order to bring back adoptees. Various embassies would contact the DoS requesting slot times who in turn would contact USSOUTHCOM to get the requested slot time.¹⁷ All these requestors had good humanitarian intentions, but they were able to by-pass an ad hoc system that was not designed for this level of demand and variety of customers. Plus these decisions should have been made by the lead civilian agency on the ground working with aviation experts and in coordination with other responsible agencies/nations.

Lessons Relearned

The utilization of military aircraft for humanitarian assistance/disaster relief (HA/DR) has a long history that dates back to 1919 when US Army aircraft dropped food to flood victims in Texas.¹⁸ One of the more notable air relief efforts was the Berlin Airlift from 1948-1949. Although strictly a military air operation it nonetheless established the importance of airlift in providing rapid assistance to those in need and became the model for how to effectively maximize the flow of aircraft in and out of an

airfield that ensures efficient delivery of commodities.¹⁹ Case studies from more recent humanitarian crisis acknowledge more guidance is needed to coordinate civil-military relief efforts.

In response to the December 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, US Pacific Air Forces (PACAF) in coordination with the Indonesian Government and other contributing militaries developed a slot time process for airports in the Aceh province of Indonesia in order to relieve congestion.²⁰ Even with slot times, poor communication and coordination resulted in several divers and mission cancelations and subsequently loss of that particular humanitarian aid delivery.²¹

One of the challenges from Operation Unified Assistance (OUA) was “the lack of clear definition, acquisition, prioritization, and communication of lift requirements.”²² This resulted in PACAF pushing relief supplies as opposed to delivering goods in priority of need. Another lesson learned eerily similar to Haiti and six years prior was the massive influx of responders and the lack of organization, “various NGOs, IGOs, and nations, including the U.S., were flying airplanes and moving supplies, but the efforts were not coordinated. Aid/supplies were being moved, but organization was lacking.”²³ Eventually, coordination cells were established to prioritize the air delivery of relief supplies, but the process was hampered by lack of understanding and written guidelines.²⁴

Less than a year later in Aug 2005, the airport in New Orleans became saturated with relief aircraft in response to Hurricane Katrina. This relief effort involved U.S. civilian and military aircraft, but suffered from the same lack of organizational structure indicative of most disaster relief efforts in the initial phase. Aircraft were landing

unannounced, there was no visibility of what cargo they were bringing, and there was no system of prioritization.²⁵

As a result of this chaotic air situation in New Orleans, a Joint Concept of Operations was developed (J-CONOPS) to synchronize U.S. military fixed wing assets supporting a domestic crisis.²⁶ This template formed the basis for the AFNORTH Regional Air Movement Control Center (RAMCC) that could, in coordination with the FAA, institute flow control in the U.S. in response to a disaster. It was this concept that formed the baseline for HFOCC operations minus the international coordination.

The Pakistan earthquake in October 2005 also received a large influx of civil-military assistance from over 19 nations.²⁷ Civil-military coordination was considered critical, but there was no Civil-Military Operations Center (CMOC) established.²⁸ Instead there was a Combined Disaster Assistance Center Pakistan (CDAC-PAK), Federal Relief Commission (FRC), and Air Operations Center (AOC), but not the standard U.S. Air Force AOC.²⁹ Coordination suffered from these ad hoc organizations as noted in an observation, “valuable exchanges of information that could have happened much earlier in the operation if such contact had been institutionalized rather than ad hoc.”³⁰

For the Pakistan floods of 2010, a Joint Air Coordination Cell (JACC) was established to coordinate international air relief efforts.³¹ It was not a rapid onset disaster in a constrained environment, but was another new ad hoc organization formed with the intent to synchronize aviation operations.

Going back to the humanitarian relief operations in Africa in the mid-90s, the same exact lessons learned highlight the challenge of air relief operations. “Seventeen countries, 16 NGOs, and several UN agencies simply chartered their own planes and

arrived at airfields in the region. Nonpriority cargo often landed before essential items.”³² As noted back then and still true today, airfields in Africa are small with limited capabilities. Therefore it is more critical under these conditions that airlift coordination and synchronization occur earlier in the initial phase of a crisis in order to alleviate suffering.³³ During Operation Support Hope (humanitarian response to the 1994 Rwandan genocide), an attempt was made to coordinate aviation activities through an air operations center established in Geneva.³⁴

Lessons learned from the recent earthquake, tsunami, and radiation leak in Japan was not so much as what happened as to what could have happened. The earthquake and tsunami damaged the nuclear power plant at Fukushima on March 11, 2011. One week later both DoS and DoD were authorized to evacuate eligible U.S. family members off the island of Honshu to the U.S. due to concerns of exposure to the radiation leak.³⁵ This voluntary assisted departure (VAD) commenced on March 19 and terminated on March 28 with a total of 25 contract flights transporting just over 5,200 personnel.³⁶ An additional 2,000 personnel departed via regularly scheduled commercial flights.³⁷

The Joint Task Force (JTF) responsible for the VAD program later named Operation Pacific Passage was JTF-505. Included in the JTF-505 EXORD was the requirement to prepare a plan for the ordered departure of approximately 85,000 personnel located within 200 NM of the Fukushima nuclear plant within five days. This draft concept of operations would require over 49,000 personnel to be airlifted out of two primary airports thus necessitating the need for flow control and slot time procedures.³⁸

Such airflow management procedures were not in place nor were any detailed procedures developed in preparation for this massive airlift requirement. One complicating factor to consider was radiation contamination and decontamination of both aircraft and personnel flying in to the “hot zone.” In a joint civil-military operation it is unlikely that civilian carriers would take the risk of exposing their air assets to radiation contamination. The nuclear leak in Japan which caused aircraft to divert around the radiation plume introduced the question of what risk will the civilian aviation community assume in order to conduct humanitarian evacuations in a radiological environment. That question needs to be addressed and will require considerable coordination for any future civil-military air operation in a contaminated environment.

These After Action Reports (AAR) all have common themes that point to the requirement for a standardized aviation coordination cell. One that can be stood up immediately in response to a crisis and begin to effectively coordinate and synchronize civil-military air relief efforts during the time critical phase of a disaster when airlift may be the only mode of transportation.

Rising Expectations for Time Critical Rapid Response

There are increasing levels of expectations from the public for governments to be able to respond to their needs in the event of a catastrophic crisis. Through the internet, images of death and destruction reach a large audience nearly instantaneously. The media seeks the dramatic in order to make the story more engaging and capture the reader’s attention. Subsequent outpourings of sympathy influence public and political opinion. Haiti had no shortage of media outlets reporting the dramatic and criticizing the response.

According to a New Zealand newspaper, a week after the earthquake aid was still not getting through, “aid is wrapped up in red tape on wharves and in airports.....the airport remains a bottleneck.”³⁹ Often it is all a matter of perspective. A day prior to this report, msnbc.com reported, “Haiti aid bottleneck is easing up.”⁴⁰ The slot allocation process attracted a lot of media attention as reports of aid stacking up at the airport were not being distributed and aircraft with doctors onboard were being diverted.⁴¹ There was an underlying expectation for a smoother operation and rightly so. Air relief efforts have a very small window of usefulness.

What occurred in Haiti might seem unprecedented and even considered an aberration, but it highlighted a weakness in processes at both the operational and strategic level of response. In the next crisis, the expectation will be for a faster more unified effort between civil-military aviation assets. Archived reports from the bottleneck at Port-au-Prince will resurface in the media to demonstrate what was not learned from previous experience.

Policy Guidance and Doctrine

When a catastrophic crisis occurs, the U.S. Government (USG) follows well established policies and procedures to render assistance. It is generally in the U.S. national interests to offer and send aid to countries suffering from a natural or manmade disaster.⁴² Overall responsibility for organizing USG response to an international disaster rests within the U.S. Agency for International Development’s (USAID) Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA).⁴³ DoD plays a supporting role when requested through the Secretary of Defense (OSD) and not a lead role in HA/DR. DoD policy guidance is written in a series of joint publications and DoD Directives.

To date there is limited guidance (strategic, operational, or tactical) on how to effectively coordinate and possibly integrate civilian and military aviation assets to increase unity of effort. The bulk of literature on civil-military operations focuses on ground centric coordination. There is civilian guidance for working with the military and military guidance for working with civilian agencies, but none of them include the word “aviation.”

The most prominent guidance on the use of military assets for humanitarian relief missions is known as the “Oslo Guidelines.”⁴⁴ Originally published in 1994 and updated several times since, it establishes international policy guidance for the use of foreign military and civil defense assets in disaster relief with the goal of increasing effective and efficient use of foreign military assets when needed.⁴⁵ The principles and procedures in this guidance have been implemented by the UN and its use is highly encouraged but non-binding on member states.⁴⁶ The U.S. humanitarian community adheres to these principles.

One of the core principles of the Oslo Guidelines is that foreign military forces should only be requested as a last resort when there is no comparable civilian alternative.⁴⁷ However, military airlift and airspace management fall under a category deemed “unique” and acceptable for humanitarian missions.⁴⁸ While the Oslo Guidelines mention the importance of UN Humanitarian Civil Military Coordination (UN-CMCoord) and the need to coexist and cooperate, there is no mention of the importance of a civil-military coordination group specific for aviation.⁴⁹ A simple addition to these guidelines could educate humanitarian actors to seek a seat at the table with their military aviation counterparts. Likewise, a change to U.S. joint publications should

contain similar verbiage that would drive U.S. military members to invite civil aviation experts into their coordination circles.

A word search in Joint Publication 3-57, Civil-Military Operations reveals aviation mentioned twice, once in a diagram for a notional Joint Civil-Military Operations Task Force.⁵⁰ In Joint Publication 3-29 Foreign Humanitarian Assistance, airlift is simply described as a service capability.⁵¹ Military forces involved in HA/DR could benefit from updated strategic guidance in both JP 3-57 and JP 3-29. Adding a template for a joint civil-military aviation coordination group that includes roles and responsibilities would assist all participants in understanding where to seek information regarding aviation matters. The lack of a common descriptive for aviation coordination groups has resulted in numerous ad hoc arrangements to satisfy the inevitable thirst for such an organization.

Ad Hoc Arrangements

Given time, the majority of humanitarian actors, both civil and military, will develop a coordination group of some type. As described in the Joint Publications, it would appear that the most likely organization for civil-military coordination would occur under the Civil-Military Operations Cell (CMOC).⁵² This was not the case for Haiti nor was it the case for previous crisis requiring civil-military air operations. Instead, ad hoc groups were created under a different acronym for each crisis although the functions were similar.

For Haiti there was no civil-military aviation coordination cell outside of the HFOCC. There were several struggles to form an ad hoc aviation coordination group that would assist with prioritizing slot times. Mention of a Combined International Coordination Center (CICC) between JTF-Haiti and MINUSTAH (United Nations

Stabilization Mission in Haiti) was forwarded in an email from AFSOUTH to AFNORTH.⁵³ It never materialized. Out of a teleconference between Joint Staff/J4, USTRANSCOM, USSOUTHCOM, and USNORTHCOM came the formation of another coordination cell, “having the non-DoD slots allocated by the Joint Interagency Humanitarian Assistance Coordination Cell (JIHACC) is definitely the solution.”⁵⁴ This cell, if it ever formed, never coordinated slot times.⁵⁵

Nearly two weeks after the earthquake, AFNORTH following a video teleconference with JTF-Haiti coordinated for an aviation representative from the UN World Food Program (UN WFP) to relocate from Haiti to Tyndall AFB and work inside the 601 AOC compound and coordinate the allocation of slot times for international carriers.⁵⁶ The arrival of Mr. Philippe Martou (UN WFP) was “invaluable to validating international airlift operations and alleviating the concern that the U.S. was unfairly dominating the operation.”⁵⁷ Three days later the HFOCC received its 3,000th slot request for Port-au-Prince.⁵⁸ However, by the end of January, the demand for access to Port-au-Prince diminished significantly as the seaport opened up and the roads were cleared of debris.

The success of managing airflow during Haiti by combining civil-military aviation experts was quickly adopted less than 6 months later in response to the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. In an operation known as Deepwater Horizon, the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) utilizing AFNORTH facilities and its relationship with the FAA organized the USCG Aviation Coordination Command (ACC).⁵⁹ This ad hoc organization was formed with the same intent as the other groups to maximize unity of effort and “ensure efficient use of air assets.”⁶⁰ No after action report is available to measure its level of

success, but this particular mission involved predominately Incident Awareness and Assessment (IAA) flights as opposed to airlift operations in a constrained environment. Deepwater Horizon was more of an airspace coordination effort to reduce potential mid-air collisions.⁶¹ The concept of interagency coordination was well developed, but the ad hoc name had two pitfalls, one is the word “command” in the title, and the other is the creation of yet another organizational name.

This lack of standardization in name hinders the awareness of this functional organization. Those who are not experts in aviation, but need to share information need be able to locate this cell through a common recognizable name among all the other coordination cells that develop during a crisis. There are a vast number of entities involved in relief operations and additional acronyms, seemingly created daily, only add to the confusion. Institutionalizing an aviation coordination cell would contribute to earlier and better coordination.

The Humanitarian Perspective

The perspective of the humanitarian community is not united as one voice. Efforts to improve civil-military operations often evoke images of soldiers working alongside civilian aid workers. This is the more controversial aspect of military assistance in humanitarian operations. The Oslo Guidelines summarizes the humanitarian perspective very succinctly, “humanitarian assistance must be provided in accordance with the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality.”⁶² Neutrality and impartiality are what humanitarians see as controversial since foreign militaries tend to choose sides in complex contingencies.

Humanitarians also prefer that military troops not be armed, yet must be in uniform, and not be in direct contact with the population.⁶³ The military should be last in

and first out and only there due to no civilian capacity to provide unique services. When discussing Africa and U.S. AFRICOM, the vice president of Humanitarian Policy and Practice at InterAction replied, “no part of the world should be a place for the U.S. military to exercise and play at being humanitarian.”⁶⁴ However, consistent recognition is given to the unique capability that military airlift provides in a time critical situation.⁶⁵

The Oslo Guidelines encourage member states to invest in increasing civilian capacity to respond to a humanitarian crisis as opposed to what they consider the ad hoc use of military forces.⁶⁶ Unfortunately, civilian organizations have yet to build the capability to prioritize air assets, provide in-transit visibility, and re-direct aircraft if necessary to allow for higher priority cargo to land ahead of lower priority cargo, the ultimate goal of synchronized operations.

Interagency Coordination and Cooperation

The goal of most cooperative efforts is to maximize capability. Unity of command is not the focal point for synchronizing civil-military air operations as it might be in a purely military endeavor. The term C2 (Command and Control) should be replaced with coordination and cooperation (2C). The problem becomes who is responsible for coordination and cooperation.

In most air relief efforts there have been separate lines of operation, one for military and one for civilian. In unconstrained environments where there is ample ramp space and few limitations this method is quite successful and meets the needs and interest of both the civilian and military agencies. Minimal coordination and cooperation are required with most coordination occurring through the affected nation’s government.

Since 1964, OFDA had been responsible for managing the USG response to foreign disasters as the lead federal agency. They develop the overall response,

provide on-scene management in support of the U.S. Ambassador, and provide funding. OFDA is comprised of humanitarian experts that provide rapid response teams to assess and conduct relief operations.⁶⁷ They have a network of experts and a number of programs in place around the world. What they do not have is an aviation cell that knows how to rapidly synchronize air operations. OFDA has logistics officers that charter aircraft for delivery of supplies.⁶⁸ They also have military liaison officers that provide input to military planning and can recommend the appropriate use of military assets, but they are not necessarily aviation airlift experts. If OFDA had aviation experts assisting with the prioritization of slot times for Haiti they were not in communication with the HFOCC. “There is no real time coordination link established between HFOCC who provides the slot times and USSOUTHCOM who establishes priorities in coordination with USG and GoH.”⁶⁹

The focal point for international civil-military coordination is the Civil-Military Coordination Section (CMCS) of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) which is under the UN.⁷⁰ OCHA publishes a tremendous amount of guidance for humanitarian workers and provides links to various organizations that enhance communication and logistical awareness of relief efforts. The logistics cluster approach used by the UN works exceedingly well, however, “it took about 2-3 weeks for all clusters to become functional,” in response to the Haiti earthquake.⁷¹ OCHA like OFDA does not have a specific aviation coordination cell. For 2011, OCHA is planning to evaluate their global civil-military coordination capacity.⁷² This is definitely a step in the right direction. It will be interesting to see if they address rapid access to airports.

Another interagency coordination tool sponsored by the UN WFP is the web site logistics cluster which contains a Logistics Operational Guide (LOG) designed “to support effective cooperation, coordination and efficient delivery of services.”⁷³ The LOG specifically mentions the air coordination center established for Haiti as an example of what is required for air operations in a constrained environment, but it merely defines what occurred in the HFOCC. It does not explain the mechanics of developing this approach or how to actually implement a prioritization process.

Another professional humanitarian committee intent on improving response processes, but cautious of military involvement is the UN’s Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). The IASC has published several papers on civil-military relationships with particular focus on the more challenging complex emergencies.⁷⁴ The IASC adheres to the same core principles in the Oslo Guidelines. The military is of last resort and humanitarian organizations should not become dependent on them.⁷⁵ Yet they are a critical body for exploring and improving civil-military relations, one that could definitely be part of the solution for synchronizing civil-military air operations.

Options and Recommendations

No two catastrophes are exactly alike is a common mantra of humanitarian workers. However, this does not mean that a new process should be created for each crisis. What needs to be adopted is a process for effectively integrating civil and military air assets at the onset of a crisis that requires a joint civil-military response. A standing coordination center for civil-military aviation should be developed. The process utilized by the HFOCC has been the closest to be able to execute real time sequencing. Knowledge of the payload and live communication links between Miami Center and the

airport allowed for some level of last minute direction to aircraft inbound to Port-au-Prince.

Developing overarching strategic guidance that establishes prioritization authority in situations where both civil and military air assets must share operating space in a constrained environment would help reduce the chaos during the initial phase of air relief operations. There also needs to be only one standardized organizational construct for aviation coordination instead of all the different ad hoc groups created during each crisis. Relearning how to synchronize air operations at the onset of a crisis inhibits the ability to meet a timely and effective response. A coordination cell that is recognized by all other agencies as the focal point for civil-military aviation challenges with defined roles and responsibilities, empowered to implement strategic guidance and solve operational issues is needed.

USAID is developing an International Operational Response Framework and also establishing a Humanitarian Policy Working Group.⁷⁶ This working group under the whole-of-government approach should also include civil and military aviation experts to study the issues, recommend possible courses of action, and develop operational guidance that can be implemented quickly during a time sensitive crisis.

Conclusion

Great strides have been made in increasing international cooperation for disaster relief. There are numerous symposiums, meetings and briefings held annually by the UN, USAID, other nations, and aid organizations. There are handbooks, field operating guides, web sites, and countless publications. There are case studies that document the burden of uncoordinated arrivals of relief aircraft on the affected country. “The

problem might be alleviated if there were a central body able to assist the affected country to coordinate the arrival of international assistance, both military and civilian.”⁷⁷

None of the previous humanitarian airlift operations should be considered failures. Most of them eventually developed into an organized relief effort. Air operations could be organized faster and executed more effectively with clear strategic guidance and well established operational processes. A standardized approach and early coordination of civil and military airlift assets is critical in the initial phase of a humanitarian catastrophe. This will be especially important for compounded emergencies such as an earthquake, tsunami, and radiation leak or flooding and pandemic outbreak.

If a crisis similar to the conditions encountered during the Haiti earthquake were to occur today, it would be the familiar chaotic start with valuable time elapsed before an ad hoc mechanism developed that increased efficiencies and unity of effort. The challenge of synchronizing civil-military air operations will require a multi-agency and multi-nation coordinated effort with an in-depth understanding of the operational and logistical requirements and limitations. Establishing a civil-military aviation planning team for international crisis response would be an initial starting point. There is no integrated process in place at this time and integration may not even be the most appropriate word to use since its translation in other languages could have connotations of command and control.

A separate emphasis on civil-military air operations added to DoD doctrine, joint publications, the Oslo Guidelines, and perhaps adopted by other nations military forces' guidance could streamline the response to an affected nation in their hour of need. The

common objective is to prevent further loss of life and provide relief as rapidly as possible. Doctrinal approaches in and of themselves cannot ensure operational success, but the strategic guidance can certainly lay the framework necessary to promote unity of effort.

As delineated in the QDDR, it is in the U.S. national interests to provide a rapid response to a country in need.⁷⁸ Using a whole-of-government approach to explore options and develop processes that address the consistent problems encountered during rapid onset disasters is necessary to meet rising expectations. The challenges encountered during the initial phases of air relief operations are well documented and potential solutions have been offered, yet there is still no joint civil-military airlift concept of operations for HA/DR. Updating strategic guidance in key publications can lay the foundation for the development of operational processes that improve the ability of both civilian and military air assets to deliver the right relief supplies to the right people at the right time.

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